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The case of the photosharing website, Flickr

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ABSTRACT: *This paper examines a sequence of asynchronous interaction on the photosharing website, Flickr. In responding to a call for a focus on the performative aspects of online annotation (Wolff & Neuwirth, 2001), we outline and apply an interaction order approach to identify temporal and cultural aspects of the setting that provide for commonality and sharing. In particular, we study the interaction as a feature of a synthetic situation (Knorr Cetina, 2009) focusing on the requirements of maintaining a sense of an ongoing discussion online. Our analysis suggests that the rhetorical system of the Flickr environment, its appropriation by participants as a context for bounded activities, and displays of commonality, affiliation, and shared access provide for a common sense of participation in a time envelope. This, in turn, is argued to be central to new processes of consociation (Schutz, 1967; Zhao, 2004) occurring in the lifeworld of Web 2.0 environments.*

Introduction

The nature, purposes, and outcomes of online commentary have been, for some time, a focus of interest in the study of changing communication practices. Indeed, the term 'comment' itself sometimes takes its meaning from the terminology of online environments, where discussion-oriented websites typically invite communication by providing a text box under a heading such as 'Would you like to Comment?' However, in the context of Web 2.0 environments such as Flickr, the relationships of commentary extend beyond the boundaries of the 'commentary' boxes provided to resources

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that are copresent with the commentary: the images that are uploaded, the photographic techniques evident in the images, and the events and identities captured in them. The copresence of the resources and their interrelationships with commentary means that communication in these contexts constitutes a rhetorical system that has its history in much older annotation relationships. In this respect, even current formalised practices of citation—acknowledgments, footnotes, dedications, et cetera—set up relationships of interaction with texts that have significance beyond formalised rituals, constituting robust indicators of interaction and relationships (Connors, 1998; Grafton, 1997).

The history of annotation practices clearly shows that the nature of different technologies and their social distribution and appropriation influence the types of social relationships that form around them. For example, prior to the proliferation of print technologies, annotations in text were crucially shaped by the fact that individuals shared the same text. The advent of print technologies individualised the activity of reading and commentary. This, together with the appropriation of annotation in the service of scholarly citation, meant that the role of annotation as part of popular collective forums declined. The burgeoning interest in applying digital technologies to annotation has again altered the scope and nature of relationships that form around them (Wolff & Neuwirth, 2001). Contemporary web-based communication and collaboration environments such as Flickr enable people to generate image and text-based content that can be shared with millions of site visitors worldwide.

This is enabled by some key characteristics of Web 2.0. As a Web 2.0 environment, Flickr is a 'platform' (O'Reilly, 2005) that contains multiple functions that cohere around the provision of an online service. As a website enabling archiving, retrieving, and communicating centring on photography, it effectively blurs traditional boundaries between the roles of 'user' and 'producer' of content, providing an environment for 'user generated content' (Beer, 2008). It is an example of the way these environments promote collaboration and sharing, allowing people to upload and access content on the web, enabling the space-time flexibility afforded by 'asynchronous' participation (Hastings, 2009). Central to its function in promoting sharing and collaboration, Flickr contains technology oriented to communication infrastructure, enabling the posting of comments colocated with—and referring directly to—the uploaded content.





This raises the question of the nature of the relationships enabled through this kind of digital environment. For those concerned with the design of systems for the purposes of sharing and collaboration, a key property of the communication afforded in these environments is that it is 'asynchronous', referring to the fact that the interaction is 'non-simultaneous' (Hastings, 2009). While clearly this was—and is—also a feature of paper-based commentary, asynchronicity appears to carry new significance in digital and web-based environments. Web-based environments are seen to provide for sharing of content that enables people to access it on demand, anytime and anywhere (Barger, Gupta, Grudin, & Sanocki, 1999). In this sense, the value of asynchronous communication lies in dispensing with the requirement for space/time colocation in collaborative activities. However, the term 'asynchronous communication', in the context of discourses about the interactions afforded by online collaborations and associations, now refers to a number of other properties of interaction that are not restricted to the idea of non-simultaneous interaction. Asynchronicity has come to refer also to the *social* properties of the interaction occurring in environments providing for non-simultaneous interaction. These are implicitly seen as a function of space-time flexibility, where, in comparison to synchronous communication, participants are seen to be able to have more time to prepare responses, review material, repair their contributions, and make contributions for which they may not have found an appropriate moment in synchronous interaction (Barger et al., 1999; Wentling, Park, & Peiper, 2007).

This paper investigates the nature of the relationships around online annotation and commentary that provide for and enable the interactional resources attributed to asynchronous environments, focusing on the case of 'photosharing' on Flickr. As such, it responds to a call from those researching these aspects of annotation relationships to focus on the performative aspects of annotation practices (Wolff & Neuwirth, 2001). The point of departure for the study is the construction of an analytical space that problematises and makes visible these performative aspects, beyond questions of the functionality of space-time flexibility. At the heart of the analysis is the adoption of an ethnomethodological approach to the analysis of temporality in social relationships. This approach is distinguished from theories of time that are *about* social order, focusing instead on temporality as a constituent feature of that social order (Rawls, 2005). Rawls characterises the ethnomethodological approach as follows:

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The underlying question is: what do actors need to do to make themselves understood by others—particularly others they know little about and have little in common with? How do social events come to be ordered—as an ongoing matter available for mutual inspection—in such a way that order is mutually available and constitutive of the coherence of the events? And, how is Time relevant to this endeavor... (Rawls, 2005, p. 167).

In this respect, the question for investigation moves away from an assumption of asynchronicity as a theory *about* the social order of annotation and commentary and opens up the question of the relevance of time, among other organising principles, *within and of* the ordering of those environments.

The paper first turns to a review of the interaction order perspective (Rawls, 1989) incorporating the work of Garfinkel in ethnomethodology, Harvey Sacks and others in conversation analysis, and Erving Goffman as a theorist of interaction. Following this, we discuss the application of this perspective to the case of online relationships of annotation and commentary, focusing on the particular knowledge contribution enabled in the application of this perspective to the question of the ordering of these environments, and also the analytical revisions that may be required in analysing online relationships as distinct from face-to-face interaction. The paper then turns to an analysis of a sequence of interaction following the posting of an image on Flickr as a means of exploring the ordering principles that provide for interaction in such an environment, with a view to describing the salience of time and other aspects of the social order in the production of annotation and commentary.

The perspective of the interaction order, online environments, and 'the synthetic situation'

The interaction order perspective offers an analytical framework suited to addressing the question of the social ordering of online annotation and commentary. It was outlined as a perspective by Rawls (1989), synthesising the theoretical and methodological insights of Erving Goffman, Harold Garfinkel, and Harvey Sacks into a specific level of social ordering—the production of localised order. Goffman's many studies (1956, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1974, 1979) documented this localised order as requiring a discrete focus of social investigation. Sociologists had sought to explain social order with reference to people's location in broader social structures and institutions. Other





social scientists were concerned to explain behaviour in terms of individual traits and motivations. Goffman (1967, 1983b) proposed the existence of a level of social order that was not reducible to either of these analytical perspectives. Through numerous studies and examples, Goffman (1967, 1983b) documented the way interaction in settings has its own principles of organisation. For example, in a study of role distance, Goffman (1961) described the way a surgeon, in the context of an operation, would adopt practices that were more casual and informal than his role self. It was not so much that the surgeon had dispensed with his role self, but rather that he was not reducible to that role, that he was more than that role. Goffman (1961) observed that this served an important purpose in the context of surgery where intense work required a relaxed focus rather than stiff formality in the surgical team. In this respect, interaction in settings has a life of its own, with its own character and needs.

Goffman's (1967, 1983b) establishment of the interaction order as a discrete level of social organisation and his focus on the situatedness of conduct was consistent with, and has frequently been used in conjunction with, studies based on the work of Harold Garfinkel (1967) in ethnomethodology and Harvey Sacks (1995) in conversation analysis. Both Garfinkel and Sacks developed social analyses of the relationship between conduct and context, departing, like Goffman (1967, 1983b), from attempts to understand practices in terms of individual motivations or the constraints of social structure. In terms of Garfinkel's (1967) perspective of ethnomethodology, practices are related to their contexts reflexively—shaped by a sense of the current context and forming a component of an ongoing context which, in turn, shapes further activity. In addition to this reflexive relationship, practices are seen as indexical—drawing their meaning from the order of events in their temporal sequence (Heritage, 1984).

These two postulates are fundamental to the work of Harvey Sacks (1995) in conversation analysis. For Sacks, conversation was the focus for a finegrained analysis of the way these principles of conduct are manifested in settings of practice. The turn-taking system that forms the framework for the sequential organisation of talk was identified as involving a nuanced set of conventions that are addressed and negotiated in the reflexive development of context (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Studies of, for example, the way interruptions are dealt with illustrate the ongoing salience of participants' attention to—and negotiation of - a normative order. As overlaps in talk that often contravene principles of turn-taking, interruptions are routinely

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followed by standard resolution procedures but can also be seen as complainable matters in interaction (Schegloff, 2002). Further, Sacks placed significant emphasis on the nature of people's descriptions, and the commonly shared understandings they imply. In this respect, the ways in which utterances refer to or index meanings and experiences that are shared with other participants through lexical choice is a central focus of investigation.

Given the focus of this study on online text and image-based communication, it is important to identify the contribution of the interaction order perspective to the analysis of communication that is neither face-to-face nor synchronous. In terms of the sequential structure and turn design of utterances in commentary sequences on Flickr, the postings display a 'quasi-conversational' character. This term originally referred to talk that is subject to institutional constraints, such as talk between doctors and patients or news interviewers and interviewees, that displays formal, role-based asymmetrical properties, but still requires turn-by-turn negotiation and flexibility and thus the possibility of some conversational informality (Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). In their discussion of quasi-conversational interaction, Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008) draw attention to the permeability and uncertainty between the boundaries of conversational and formal talk. Thus, the character of talk cannot be reduced to the roles that participants inhabit, but rather to their ongoing adaptations to context employing both formal and informal styles and strategies.

More recently, the term has been used to refer to web-based interaction that may not necessarily display the asymmetries of talk in formal interaction. In this case, to address the absence of actual face-to-face and synchronous features of conduct, the posts are ordered 'as if' they were produced conversationally. As Relieu (2005) has pointed out, this is achieved in part by the design of the online environment in which posts are organised as spatially sequential. However, the quasi-conversation is also crucially an accomplishment of the participants, where they continually produce new posts 'as if' they are part of an ongoing conversation (Relieu, 2005). Again, the character of the talk cannot be attributed to the roles of participants or to the design of the environment alone. In keeping with this approach, a growing body of empirical research has detailed the ethnomethods employed by interactants to sustain involvement in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Despite the apparent limitations of textual interaction, the ability of users to adapt to textual modality and strategically use language (Herring, 1999) means that many of





the conversational strategies employed in face-to-face interaction remain foundational to the coherence of CMC. For instance, in their study of internet relay chat (IRC) interaction, Rintel and Pittam (1997) demonstrate how initiatory, propitiatory, and exploratory strategies are crucial in the performance of IRC openings, as, conversely, are mitigatory and consolidatory strategies in performing closings. Just as conversational strategies for opening and closing resemble interactional expectations from face-to-face interaction, so, too, local sequence management relies on the construction of turn-taking units (Reed, 2001) and an orientation to accountability (Antaki, Ardévol, Núñez, & Vayreda, 2005) 'as if' produced in face-to-face interaction. As such, the construction of asynchronous conversation represents an accomplishment of the interactants as they maintain a 'continuing state of incipient talk' (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973, p. 325) online. Thus, a conversational space is created with which interactants can disengage and reengage without explicitly 'reopening' the talk-in-interaction.

Building on these observations, Knorr Cetina (2009) has sought to conceptualise the nature of the interaction order that enables these patterns of online interaction. She proposes that this interaction can be characterised in terms of the dynamics of a 'synthetic situation' as distinct from the 'natural' situation that underpinned Goffman's (1956, 1961, 1963, 1967, 1974, 1979) studies, which, for most of the time, functioned as a silent and background feature of a setting, and the requirements of online global interactions. The online situation contains information and resources that are required to be continually updated in order for the environment to operate as a setting of activity. This might involve lists of who else may be involved in the interaction or links to supporting documents and information. This commitment to continuous monitoring and updating activity to maintain the situation online also involves a temporal commitment to maintaining these environments as 'live' and 'relevant', meaning that they are experienced as constantly in flux. They also frequently constitute a key resource, element, or 'symbolic interaction partner' in settings involving physical copresence.

These features of synthetic interaction require a specific kind of response system. This involves the management of ongoing response presence where 'the interacting party is not or need not be physically present but is accountable for responding without inappropriate delay to an incoming attention or interaction request' (Knorr Cetina, 2009, p. 74). This requires continuous monitoring of the environment and sensory attunement as it updates and changes, because an individual's

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response cannot be appropriate if they are not aware of what is going on. This involves responsibility for a level of preparedness to ensure that when they occur, responses are adequately resourced and thought through.

Online relationships in this context thus require what Knorr Cetina (2009) refers to as time transactions. Without the resources and cues of copresence—and, in the case of Flickr, the absence of synchronicity in responses—the management of interaction intensifies the requirement for a common sense of participation in a ‘time envelope’. Knorr Cetina (2009, p. 80) elaborates on this as follows: ‘With a time transaction, one is trapped in a time envelope, a strong forward connectedness of interactional responses suggesting that we should think of the whole series as belonging together’.

On websites such as Flickr, posts of images and commentary are produced in discrete segments. However, the sense of the occasion as constituting a potentially ongoing discussion informs the discrete contributions. In this sense the time envelope of the interaction is an important resource in an ongoing and prospective expectation of the sense of interaction and the connection of individual utterances to that sense.

In this respect, Knorr Cetina’s (2009) work provides a framework in which to investigate the nature of quasi-conversational interaction in an ‘asynchronous’ online setting, opening up the question of the way in which time and other aspects of the setting constitute an online interaction order. We now turn to a review of Flickr as a context for the study of these relationships.

Flickr as a context for studying ‘asynchronous’ annotation and commentary

On entering the Flickr website (<http://www.Flickr.com/>), the visitor sees a page that introduces the purpose of the website; presents details of uploads, tags, et cetera, which are constantly updated; and indicates a range of different interests or relationships of use from which the visitor may choose as follows:





Figure 1.



Clicking on the 'Share and stay in touch' link, visitors are invited to 'share', and are provided with information on the different options regarding levels of sharing available to those who wish to upload photos, instructions pertaining to starting a group, and details regarding privacy, in addition to an invitation at the bottom of the page to 'Sign up now!'.

The 'Upload and Organize' section provides options for the ways in which images can be uploaded, while the 'Make Stuff' icon can be clicked on to find out the kinds of contexts in which images can be incorporated or appropriated through use of tools on the website: 'Prints, calling cards, photo-books, slideshow-DVDs, postage stamps, and much more'. The 'Explore' link presents options for visitors to search for images by tags, the time the image was taken (e.g., 'a year ago today'), 'sets'—sets of photos taken of certain objects (e.g., dolls), or by groups—for example, one group goes under the name of 'abandoned' containing images of abandoned sites, buildings, and so on. In this way, the Flickr environment invokes community through inviting self-category membership in relation to specific topics (Fitzgerald & Housley, 2002). Topics provide a basis or warrant for participation to which self-category membership must be invoked locally as reflected in the content volunteered by participants and by the way in which proceeding commentary is indexed. Whether one

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is 'sharing', 'uploading', 'making stuff', or 'exploring', participation is constructed on the basis of recognition of oneself as a member and the mutual recognition of others as coparticipants in a community (Ricoeur, 2005). Membership is thus a key feature of 'photosharing' on Flickr.

In 'exploring' the website in order to observe the nature of interests represented and the processes that facilitated and enabled the activities around 'sharing', annotation, and commentary, we observed the wide variety of interests and themes that provided the motivation and means of connection for participants through the posting of images. One of the many dimensions across which the postings vary is the extent to which the subject matter is of very specific or very broad appeal. For example, 'sets' of images can attract participation from people with a very definite and clearly demarcated substantive interest, whereas other topics clearly have the potential for a wider audience with potentially diverse relationships to the subject matter. Within these areas of substantive focus, many of the publicly available images also attest to varying degrees and types of membership in photographic communities, providing for both substantive technical and artistic bases for participation and commentary. The image and exchange we selected for analysis was theoretically selected as maximising the bases on which members might participate. The image selected was of Barack Obama taken during the 2008 election campaign—an extremely popular figure enmeshed in an issue, namely the U.S presidential election campaign—which was gathering momentum over the period during which the posting of the image and substantive commentary were appearing. In this respect, we strategically sought to vary the possible nature and types of commentary and access to the material that was uploaded.

Once we had identified the image of interest, we were initially presented with a depiction of the image in a preview format, which includes information such as the author's username, 'J-a-x'; metadata that identifies the image; and a count of previous responses. By clicking on the preview, we were presented with a larger depiction of the image (<http://www.Flickr.com/photos/j-a-x/2279528341/>) and an initial annotation posted by the author of the image as follows:

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Figure 2.



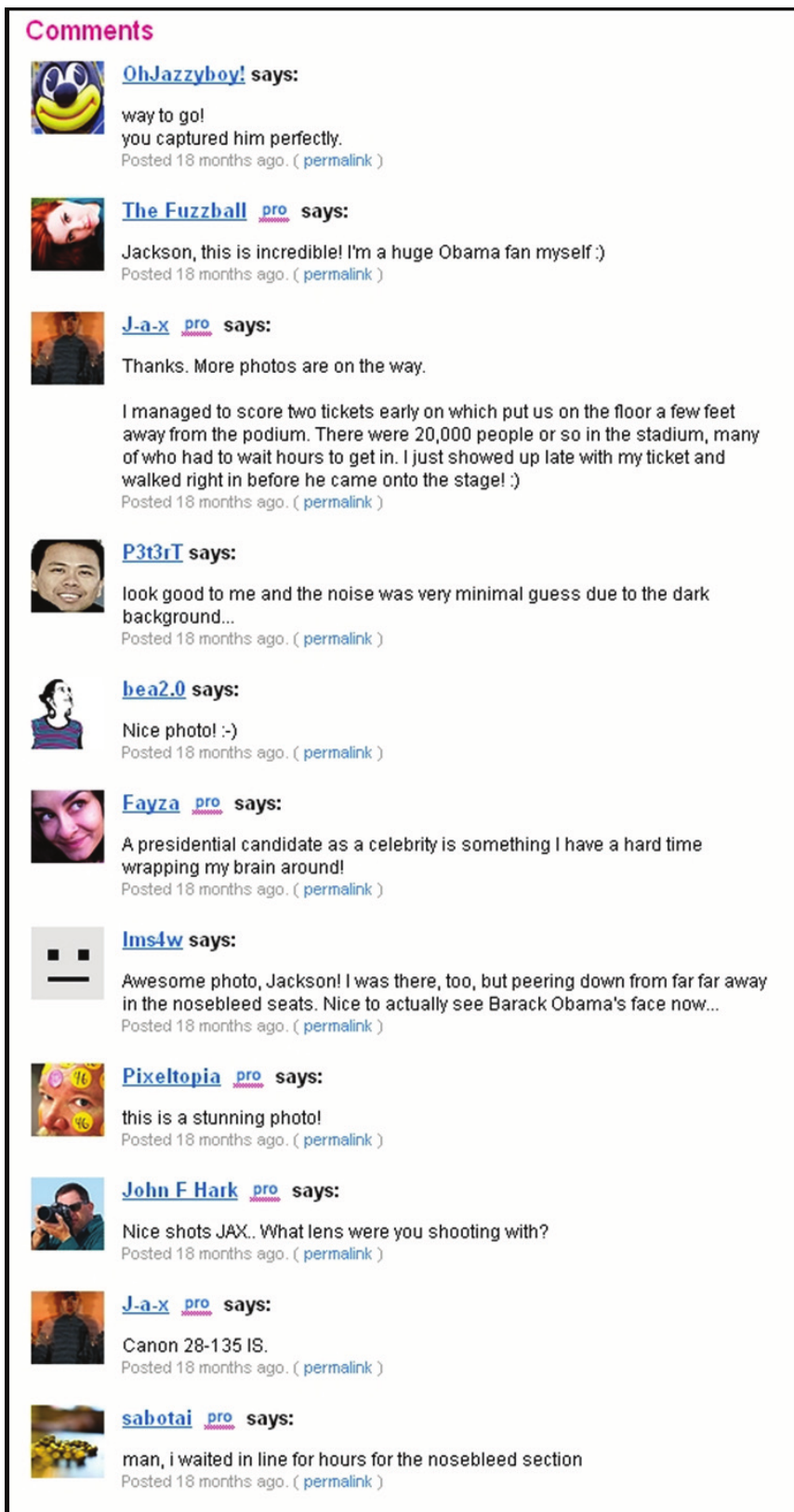
Following this, commentary pertaining to the image and first-turn unfolded down the page in a temporal order as it commonly does on blogs and online forums, with the most current reply posted at the bottom so that the first person to respond to the author will be at the top of the page. Replies and responses, therefore, appear in chronological order, so that participants can scroll through the 'thread' of commentary to the bottom of the page to find the most recent post. To submit a comment, participants must be registered members of Flickr. Once they are on the site as a member, they can enter a comment in the 'comment submission box' at the bottom of the page. In this respect the environment was designed to serve as a physical envelope or container in which replies and responses were made relevant and where these were seen as connected, both spatially and referentially, to the initial post and comment. In this respect, the comments form part of a system of cross-referenced resources that together facilitate forms of communication and identification, central to a rhetorical system (Burke, 1969). The paper now turns to an analysis of the design and sequencing of turns by participants in the commentary thread presented below.

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Figure 3.





The image and comment as first turn

In order for images to be shared, they must first be displayed. Additionally, in many instances on Flickr, they are also introduced by their creators in a text box that appears underneath the image. As shown above, the image selected for discussion here was a photo taken of Barack Obama during his election campaign.

The turn positioned underneath the image is structured as a first turn at talk that clearly topicalises and provides for further talk on the image. The first component of J-a-x's turn, 'my first photo of a celebrity', positions the utterance as a news announcement (Button & Casey, 1985) which, in conversation, generally provides for some receipt of the news by participants in subsequent turns. The next component of the turn is organised as three assessments (Pomerantz, 1984) as follows:

1. It was an interesting challenge to shoot indoors in a huge crowd like this,
2. but I think it turned out okay!
3. If you view it 100% you'll notice a bit of noise (ISO 1600) but I still think it turned out pretty well.

For Pomerantz (1984), a key property of assessments is that they refer to, and are sometimes produced concurrently with, participation in an event. In the above case, the production of the assessments in conjunction with the display of the image of the event serves to position the utterance as gesturing to the image as a representation of the event (e.g., 'in a huge crowd like this'), and as an image with specific qualities (e.g., 'If you view it 100% you'll notice a bit of noise (ISO 1600) but I still think it turned out pretty well'). Assessments often display or imply the connection between participating and assessing (Pomerantz, 1984). The inferences concerning these connections are crucial in the entire turn in providing material for subsequent commentary. For example, in 1, the details of the participation—'shooting indoors in a huge crowd'—are combined with a sense of the participation—'it was an interesting challenge'. The next two assessments refer to the same participation details but provide different facets of the author's sense of participation. Clearly, what links them is a sense of participation as a photographer: First, as someone facing the challenge of capturing the image (1) and subsequently as a photographer assessing the image as an outcome of this challenge (2 and 3).

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Heritage and Raymond (2005) point to characteristics of the management of assessments that are central to our understanding of the key role of the first turn discussed above in promoting subsequent quasi-conversational interaction. Assessments are central in issues of the ritual or symbolic management of talk, and these, in turn, are frequently implicated in knowledge claims. To volunteer an experience and an assessment or evaluation of that experience involves putting oneself 'on the line'. Goffman (1956, p. 268) observed that 'During interaction the individual is expected to possess certain attributes, capacities, and information which, taken together, fit together into a self that is at once coherently unified and appropriate for the occasion'.

However, in both face-to-face and online settings, there may well be risks to these expectations regarding how others may see the experience volunteered or affiliate with the judgements. Goffman (1956) proposed that embarrassment and related issues of 'face' of self and other were considerations that had to be foreseen and prepared for in talk.

In the utterance above, there is considerable subtlety in the claims underlying it. First, there are clear claims to first-hand access to the event. Second, there are also claims to knowledge and authority in relation to photography. For example, the assessments imply the author's knowledge of the nature of the challenge in capturing the image and also in the basis for assessing its quality. However, there is also a slight room for doubt or deprecation in the tone of the assessments, exemplified in 'If you view it 100% you'll notice a bit of noise (ISO 1600)'. In this respect, the possibility of other assessments of his work and of photographic expertise in his addressees are acknowledged, but is accompanied by an invitation for agreement on the part of coparticipants ('but I still think it turned out pretty well'). It is important to note that this agreement invitation is underpinned by coparticipants' shared access to the image that is the subject of the assessments enabled by the website. Thus, while they are not copresent, and were not necessarily at the event captured in the image, they are given considerable epistemic rights in assessing the image by virtue of the first-hand access to the image provided by the website. In this respect, the design of the website in combining images with commentary that refers to them becomes part of a 'synthetic situation' that enables considerable epistemic access to what is being assessed. Coherence in this setting can be seen as achieved by a fine balance between knowledge and authority in photography on the part of the





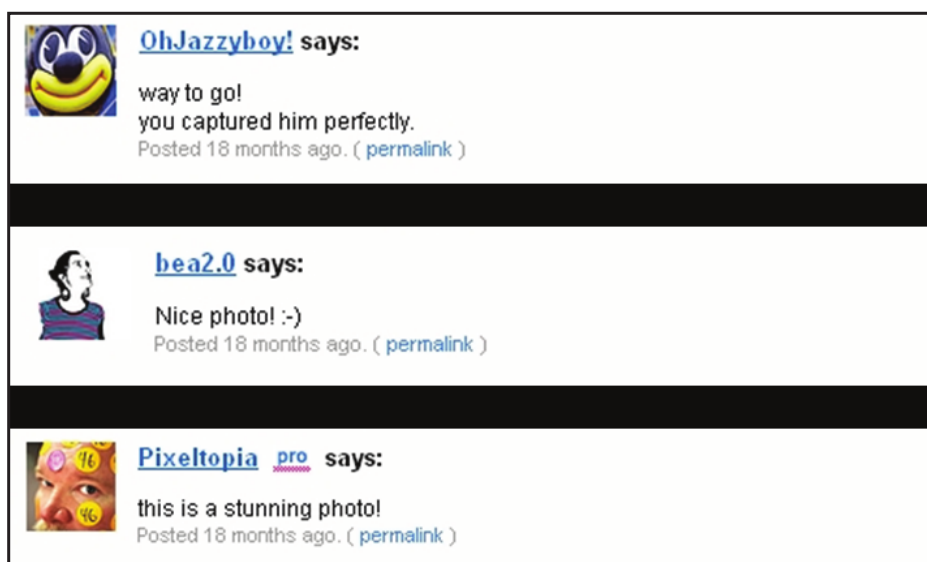
photographer and his deference to the possibility of other judgements and authority on the part of other potential participants.

The depiction of the photograph of Barack Obama and the initial first turn discussed above was followed by a sequence of commentary (as presented earlier) that, while posted over a period of time, shares many temporal features of synchronous and copresent conversation. This is achieved by tying and aligning the comments as second turns following the first posted by the author. In particular they are, for the most part, designed as second position assessments to J-a-x's initial first position assessments discussed above. While the first positioned assessment provided a range of epistemic grounds on which agreement was sought, the 'seconds' proffered agreement and both implicitly and explicitly displayed common access to the knowledge underpinning the author's first post. Analytically, the comments can be categorised by the nature of the knowledge relationships they display with J-a-x's photo and first turn.

Simple second positioned assessments

Some of the comments were concerned with commentary only on what was directly referenced in the first turn and offered no new material, as exemplified in utterances 1, 5, and 8.

Figure 4.





These brief comments represent 'upgrades' or strong agreements (Pomerantz, 1984) with the author's initial assessments, reinforcing and displaying common access to the grounds of assessment. The strong ties to the first utterances are thus not solely related to their positive tone, but are also achieved implicitly on what need not be said—what can be understood or taken for granted as shared between the participants. These include the grounds for judging photo quality and the skills required in capturing the image. As such, as Maynard and Zimmerman (1984) observe, the interaction itself displays properties traditionally attributed to acquainted persons or 'consociates', which, in Schutz's (1967) conceptualisation, are people whose face-to-face experiences inform each other of what the other can be relied on to know (Maynard & Zimmerman, 1984). This is contrasted with those who are unacquainted and who share only membership of the same society (contemporaries). Superimposed on the common access to knowledge displayed in the first and second assessments is another set of tacit assumptions that the first assessment and its seconds constitute a specific 'strip of time' (Goffman, 1974): a situation and episode shared in time. These assumptions are made and sustained without the resources of face-to-face cues, constraints, and commitments.

Access to Obama, celebrity, and the event depicted in the photo

The initial first turn by J-a-x invited an array of warrants for membership. While second turn assessments consistently served in the establishment of commonality and affiliation, preferred agreement was absent in the following case:

Figure 5.



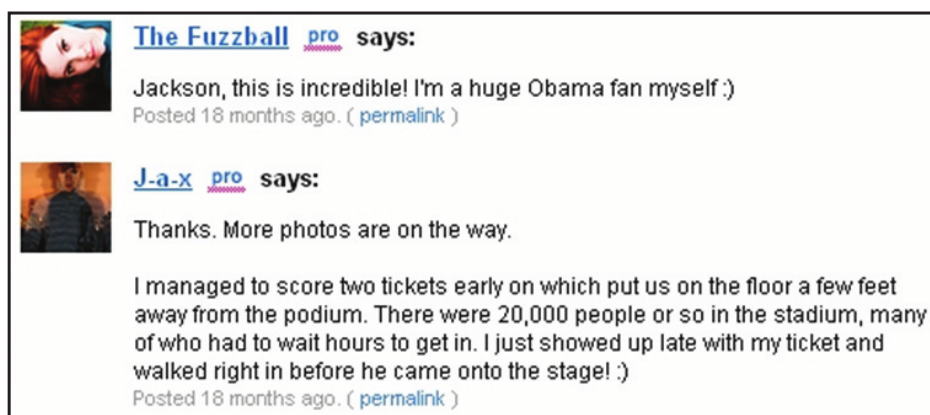
In response to a particular utterance in J-a-x's initial first turn, 'My first photo of a celebrity', Fayza proceeds to establish a form of 'cross-membership' by drawing on J-a-x's categorisation of Obama as a 'celebrity' in order to raise, or question, what is seen as a category disjuncture. Most of the other comments, however, were framed as upgrading second assessments and contained other material that





was potentially available as a discussion context. The nature of the additional material testified to a range of different kinds of access to the knowledge displayed in the first turn. One of the comments provided an assessment followed by a declaration 'I'm a huge Obama fan myself :)', which prompted a 'reply' from J-a-x as follows:

Figure 6.



This exchange illustrates the ways in which the participants collaboratively construct both substantive and temporal connections through commentary. In 2, The Fuzzball refers to the author of the image as 'Jackson', implying knowledge of J-a-x's actual name and thus some level of acquaintance or 'consociation'. This is followed by an 'upgrade' assessment component referencing the quality of the image followed by 'I'm a huge Obama fan myself :)'. While this turn component is not nominating an entirely new topic, it serves to report a disposition on the part of The Fuzzball that is a discrete addition to what has been overtly topicalised in the discussion so far: the fan relationship. Applying Button and Casey's (1985) analysis of topic in conversation, we could assert that since the topic of Obama reported in this turn component is speaker-related, it thus brings into the commentary sequence The Fuzzball's orientation to Obama as a potential resource for further topic talk, positioning the addressee, J-a-x, as a candidate and appropriate recipient of the news, and other visitors or participants on the website as 'overhearers' in this relationship.

However, the management of this announcement and its receipt by J-a-x situates it not as a new aspect of the topic on which The Fuzzball might produce further talk, but rather a specific kind of topicalisation of J-a-x's first turn. The production of the smiley, :) , at the end of the announcement provides some indication that what is being referenced

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here is not entirely caught up in the biography and experience of The Fuzzball, but rather affiliates in some way with what has already been volunteered in J-a-x's first turn. This orientation of the utterance is further confirmed in the 'hearing' of the Fuzzball's utterance produced by J-a-x. Following his receipt of Fuzzball's second assessment in 'Thanks. More photos are on the way', J-a-x produces a story that elaborates on the first-hand details of his orientation to the event and his attainment of a position close to Obama.

I managed to score two tickets early on which put us on the floor a few feet away from the podium. There were 20,000 people or so in the stadium, many of who had to wait hours to get in. I just showed up late with my ticket and walked right in before he came onto the stage! :)

In this respect, J-a-x treats Fuzzball's announcement as an occasion to supply further detail of his being able to 'score' tickets that put him so close to the podium, and to walk in late past people who had queued for hours to stand so close to Obama. The tie to Fuzzball's announcement is further accentuated in the production of another smiley at the end of the story. Inferentially, the importance of Fuzzball's announcement 'I am a huge fan of Obama myself :)' lies in its affiliation with the experience of being so close to Obama displayed in J-a-x's first turn—an experience that would be appreciated by a 'huge fan' of the presidential candidate.

Closely tied to the affiliative work achieved through the referencing of Obama in these turns is the management of them as temporally sequential, 'as if' they were produced in conversation. There is no technical provision on Flickr to tie utterances to others in a specific thread. The only way one turn can appear directly after another is for participants to monitor the website for recent posts and to place a comment before other participants can do so. Flickr encourages this commitment by sending an alert to people who have posted photos, advising them that someone has commented on the image. In this respect, placing utterances in a sequence that resembles conversation is a significant achievement in temporal coordination, displaying a level of commitment to the conversational preference system and thus to the commentary thread as a conversation.

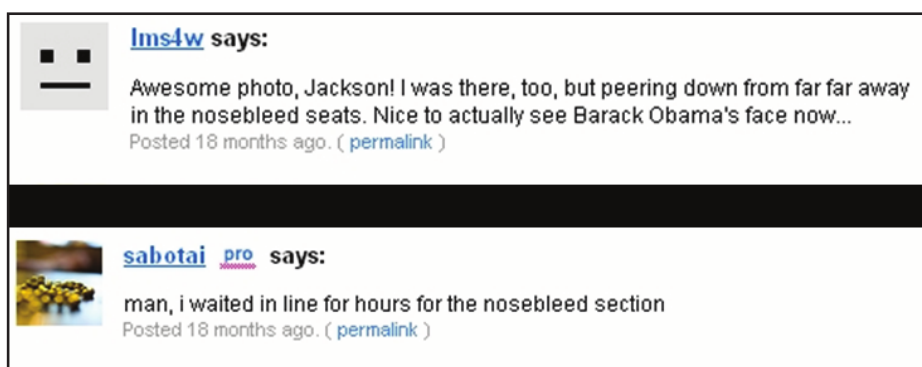
A key feature of the relationships established in the above sequence is that there are clear differences in access to the event and aspects of





the photo between J-a-x and other participants that have a bearing on epistemic rights in the interaction. As Heritage and Raymond (2005) point out, while 'affiliation and agreement generally are sought from others; when provided, they must respect the parties' information territories and their associated epistemic rights' (p. 36). The Fuzzball had already indicated their affiliation with—and appreciation of—J-a-x's attendance and access. A similar deference to J-a-x's access to and knowledge of the event and the circumstances of the photograph can be found in the following comments:

Figure 7.



While these utterances did not appear adjacent to J-a-x's first turn, nor to each other, they are clearly tied to each other and to the first turn as 'second stories'. For Sacks (1995), stories are reports of events. J-a-x's first turn produced an introduction to his photograph in conjunction with a description of the event and process that formed the context of the photograph's production. In conversation, stories may be receipted by response tokens (e.g., 'mm hm') or receipts of them as newsworthy (e.g., 'Oh really!'). Another common utterance following a story is the production by a coparticipant of a second story. Their relationship to first stories was described by Sacks as follows:

'showing understanding', 'searching experience,' 'seeing the point' ...turns on the fact that the second story involves the hearer of the first turning up a story which stands as an analysis of the other, critically by virtue of that story involving the teller of the second playing a role precisely similar to the first's, for a story which is similar to the first's. In short, that the teller's place in the story is the key thing for searching one's experience, providing a strong clue as to the sort of search one should do. (Sacks, 1995, p. 771).

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The key to understanding the significance of second stories is the way they display—rather than simply claim—access to elements in the first story (Silverman, 1998). As such, they are powerful mechanisms for collaboratively asserting and displaying commonality. In the current examples, however, they are also a means of displaying a subordinate epistemic claim to that displayed in J-a-x's first turn. In lms4w's utterance, following a second assessment, is an announcement of attendance at the same event as J-a-x, accomplished in a way that defers to J-a-x's privileged access by indicating a position 'far far away in the nosebleed seats', and an appreciation of the view of Obama's face enabled by the photo. Sabotai's comment, 'man, i waited in line for hours for the nosebleed section' is a story with direct ties to both J-a-x's story segment in 3, 'There were 20,000 people or so in the stadium, many of who had to wait hours to get in', and lms4w's reference to sitting far away in the nosebleed seats. It is also clearly tied to both through direct access to the event. Again, however, there is clear deference to J-a-x's privileged access to the event. Whereas J-a-x had walked into the stadium late straight into the seats near the podium, Sabotai had 'waited in line for hours for the nosebleed section'. The commonality displayed here required no explicit reference to photography or to the specific image under discussion. Rather the copresence of the image and commentary thread meant that copresence at the event and seating position relationships were sufficient explicit resources for tying Sabotai's utterance to both J-a-x's and lms4ws'.

Access to technical aspects of the photograph

Commonality in relation to knowledge of photography was a key epistemic principle implicitly connecting all of the comments in some way. However, as illustrated in the following examples, some utterances explicitly displayed technical knowledge in common with that displayed by J-a-x as follows:

Figure 8.

	P3t3rT says: look good to me and the noise was very minimal guess due to the dark background... Posted 18 months ago. (permalink)
	John F Hark <small>pro</small> says: Nice shots JAX.. What lens were you shooting with? Posted 18 months ago. (permalink)
	J-a-x <small>pro</small> says: Canon 28-135 IS. Posted 18 months ago. (permalink)





In 4, P3t3rT's observation 'the noise was very minimal guess due to the dark background...' implicitly focuses the initial assessment component of his turn 'look good to me' on technical aspects of the photo quality and displays common knowledge of J-a-x's assessment criteria pertaining to noise in the photo. Similarly, in 9, John F Hark's question 'What lens were you shooting with?' provides additional context for the second positioned assessment, 'Nice Shots JAX', displaying understanding of the significance of the lens choice in the photo outcome. However, the question also positions J-a-x as accountable for possessing this knowledge, substantiated in his response in 10, 'Canon 28-135 IS.' Again, the accomplishment of this response directly following the question was enabled by J-a-x's temporal readiness to respond prior to the posting of comments by other participants.

Conclusion: Asynchronicity, coparticipation and the performance of annotation on Flickr

The very nature of asynchronicity enables an independence of social proximity from corporeal proximity, and this has long been a central theme of phenomenological discussions of the spatial-temporal arrangement of the social world, that is, the world of shared meaning. For Alfred Schutz (1967), space and time are regarded as intersubjectively constructed conditions of the social world, differentiating between two basic ideal-typical categories of human actors that we experience. On the one hand, *consociates* are those with whom one shares the same time and spatial access to one another's lived bodies. We engage with consociates in a *we-relationship* through face-to-face interaction. On the other hand, *contemporaries* are those with whom one shares the same time but to whose lived bodies one lacks access. As such, we relate to contemporaries in a *they-relationship* through non-face-to-face interaction. While contemporaries are merely alive at the same time with a given actor, consociates are those who can reciprocally understand and influence one another within a shared place as well as in the shared time.

With the emergence of web-based environments, interactants are afforded the opportunity to establish the we-relationship in a novel type of shared meaning context. As Zhao (2004) explains, in web-based environments, the boundary between Schutz's (1967) ideal-types of contemporaries and consociates is transcended with a new category of *consociated contemporaries*, actors with whom one engages in a we-relationship of telecopresence mediated through face-to-device interaction. As such, consociated contemporaries come to know each

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other in online occasions based on contexts of shared intersubjective meaning derived from lived-through common experiences (Zhao, 2004). This raises the question of the properties and processes of web-based environments that provide for these new processes of consociation.

There are two key interrelated dimensions to participation in the commentary sequence discussed above that are central to our exploration of the process of consociation on Flickr as a Web 2.0 environment. The first pertains to the study of the interaction as annotation relationships, drawing attention to the copresence of the discussion and the image that it focuses on as parts of a rhetorical system. This copresence provided a crucial resource for displays of common access to knowledge by participants and to specific relationships of face and deference organised around authorship of the photograph. In his analysis of 'Footing', Goffman proposes that

coordinated task activity—not conversation—is what lots of words are part of. A presumed common interest in effectively pursuing the activity at hand, in accordance with some overall plan for doing so, is the contextual matrix which renders many utterances, especially brief ones, meaningful. (Goffman, 1981, p. 143)

The interrelationships between the photo, its introduction by J-a-x, and subsequent commentary constitute a task activity. The posting and introduction serve to set up the capacity in which J-a-x speaks, which, for Goffman, 'goes some distance in establishing a corresponding reciprocal basis of identification for those to whom this stand-taking is addressed' (Goffman, 1981, p. 145). The activity is introduced by J-a-x as author of both the utterance and the image, the utterance positioning the image in a story in which J-a-x himself is a key figure. Those who subsequently comment then position themselves as addressees of this utterance, as 'listeners' to the story, and then as coparticipants in an activity oriented to affiliation, appreciation, and displays of commonality, with J-a-x, the image, and the event and identity it represented. The commonality of the activity is further accentuated by the common sight of the photo, the evidence of attention and involvement displayed through commentary, and the simulated expressions (smileys) produced by participants (Goffman, 1981).





The second, related dimension of participation pertains to a complex temporality managed in the context of asynchronicity. In orienting to sharing an activity, the participants constitute it as a form of occasion. Goffman (1974) infused his analysis of activity and occasions with concepts that pointed to temporal relationships. In asynchronous environments, his conceptualisation of 'presuppositions' is of particular significance, pointing to the potential importance of the *prospect* of participation and what can be assumed in common on that occasion:

Assumptions regarding knowledge prior to an occasion are situational in that they depend on who in particular is present in the encounter under consideration; however, any occasion when the same two persons come into communicative contact will allow them to make some of the same presuppositions about information. (Goffman, 1983a, p. 17).

Asynchronicity may provide a critical resource in participants' sense of the commonality on which the activity is based, allowing time for preparation around details of what can be assumed. The internet in general and Flickr in particular provide an always available facility to search for and supplement one's knowledge and understanding of the author, the event, and relevant aspects of photography. The time to prepare observed in literature on asynchronous environments and the monitoring and preparedness noted by Knorr Cetina (2009) could constitute a crucial resource in participants' understanding of both cognitive and ritual aspects of presuppositions. It is clear that the presence of the image was a key resource for displays of common understandings and knowledge. However, the pervasive commitment to displaying and assuming commonality could well be also attributed to the participants' attending to the prospect of participation and the details of knowledge required for participation.

In the event of the occasion itself, Goffman pointed to the importance of 'episodic conventions', drawing attention to the importance of marking the activity as a discrete strip of interaction (Goffman, 1974, p. 251). The posting of the image and its introduction constituted a key 'ritual bracket', marking the beginning of the activity at hand through announcements and assessments, and attuning other participants to this activity and its relevant roles and relationships, thereby providing for the sustained involvement of an encounter (Goffman, 1981). Further, the different aspects of the online discussion could be understood as 'internal brackets'. In a theatre environment, these may

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mark different acts in a play and, of course, in the context of 'real' time, these are assumed to be organised sequentially. However, in the Flickr environment, participants 'bracketed' their utterances according to the aspects of the image and the event on which they sought to comment, and by tying their utterances to each other within these aspects by implying common access, experience, or affiliation.

The two dimensions of the Flickr environment that are central to participation—its constitution as a set of activities and occasions, and its complex temporal ordering—are key 'situational proprieties' (Goffman, 1963, p. 24) of the occasion we described. We suggest that these two interrelated characteristics contribute to the performance of annotation as a synthetic situation. The rhetorical system of the environment, its appropriation by participants as a context for bounded activities, enabled by their commitment to displays of commonality, affiliation, and shared access, provided for a common sense of participation in a 'time envelope'. These features are proposed to be central to the processes of consociation for which the relationships enabled by Web 2.0 appear to create new possibilities.

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Notes

1. It should be noted here that our focus on the interrelationships enabled by the copresence of image and commentary constitutes an analysis of *part* of the rhetorical system of the Flickr environment that we selected. The image and commentary were also copresent with other resources such as metadata, the capacity to access other images posted by the author, and so on, that are also key aspects of the environment. However, the scope of the current paper did not permit a detailed analysis of these elements as part of the system.

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